

RECREATION

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STATE DOCUMENTS

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POTENTIAL



INVENTORY

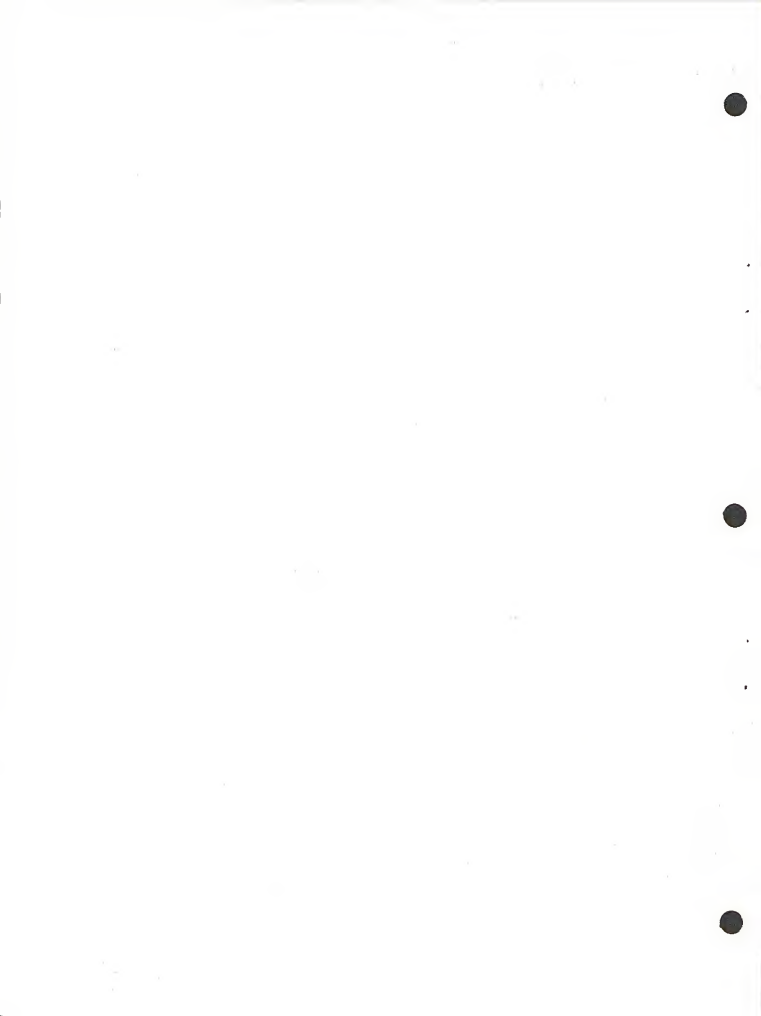
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SANDERS COUNTY



1968



PREFACE

The following report has been compiled as a result of appraising the potential for twelve outdoor recreational developments in Sanders County, Montana. This follows the recreation and tourism portion of the Sanders County Overall Economic Development Program made in 1963.

This report, as of September 1968, was made possible through cooperative efforts of the Sanders County Technical Action Panel and the following people, agencies and organizations:

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Montana Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service	
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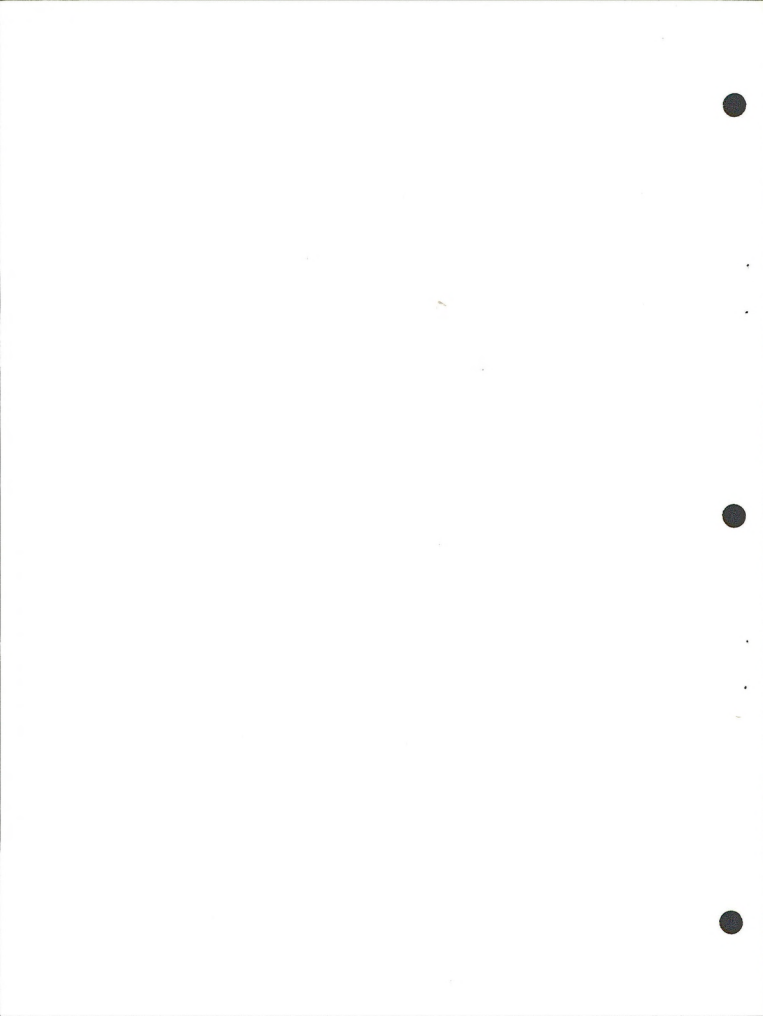


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INTRODUCTION

Appraising the potentials for outdoor recreation is an essential step in the basic planning to meet recreational needs of an area.

THIS GUIDE TO RECREATION POTENTIALS WITHIN SANDERS COUNTY IS SOLELY THAT, AND SHOULD NOT BE INTERPRETED AS A FINAL ECONOMIC APPRAISAL FOR ANY OR ALL SEGMENTS OF RECREATION ENTERPRISES.

Some of the key elements used in this appraisal included: climate; scenery and scenic areas; natural areas; historic areas; soils; water - existing water areas and impoundment sites; wildlife - habitat and population; population of people-size and distribution, age and occupation and income levels; proximity and access; rural ownership and land-use pattern.

Local area influences as well as distant urban centers (up to 300 miles) were considered throughout this analysis. The end result of this appraisal process is a group of conclusions regarding the potentials for future development of the important kinds of recreation areas and enterprises in Sanders County.

This was essentially a group judgment process backed up by the factual information. The group followed a procedure, "Guide to Making Appraisals of Potentials for Outdoor Recreation Developments" prepared by the United States Department of Agriculture.

I VACATION CABINS, COTTAGES, AND HOMESITES

Vacation cabins, cottages, and homesites can provide rural living space in scenic or natural areas or close to various outdoor recreation activities. This includes rental units on either a daily or a seasonal basis. This also includes vacation homes or cabins built for sale. It could also include group camps.

The recreational potential for vacation cabins, cottages and homesites for Sanders County is medium with a score of 98 out of a possible 150. An evaluation of this potential shows that some successful future development is possible in the area.

Climate is judged to be favorable in comparison with surrounding areas. Summer temperatures in the western and timbered sections of the County are generally somewhat cooler than the Spokane or Missoula areas. The winter climate is generally quite a bit milder than the surrounding area.

Scenery & Natural Areas is judged to be favorable in comparison with surrounding areas. There is an abundance of timbered mountainous terrain including wilderness and wildlife areas. The National Bison Range is located in the eastern end of the county and the Cabinet Wilderness area is located near the western end of the county. The Clark Fork and Flathead rivers extend over 100 miles for the entire length of the county. There are three dams located on the Clark Fork River in Sanders

county. There is an abundance of shoreline property that could be developed for vacation cabins, cottages and homesites. There has been some development but only a very small percentage of the possible sites have been developed.

Soils are generally adequate to good for building construction. Usually there will be no problem with sewage disposal or with foundation construction. There is quite a wide variation in the soils however, and local inquiry should be made for specific sites.

Population, Proximity & Access are all elements that have a significant influence on the potential for vacation cabins, cottages and homesite enterprises. The largest population center within 300 miles of Sanders county is the Spokane area which is about 100 miles from the western edge of the county. The proximity of large urban areas is a key element that ranks low for Sanders county. Access roads are generally good for all types of potential and existing vacation sites.

II CAMP GROUNDS

Vacation Site - The potential for this type camp ground is high. There are numerous existing public campgrounds, mostly off the main travel routes, but there are no such privately owned enterprises.

Climate from June through mid-September is ideal for camping. The days, particularly in July, August and September are warm and the nights are always cool. The first half of June is usually rainy.

Scenery is superb. The vally and surrounding mountains are heavily forested on the west half but more open on the east of the county. The Clark Fork of the Columbia runs full length of the valley with numerous mid-stream tributaries. The mountains are rugged and challenging. There are numerous mountain lakes and streams waiting for the ambitious hiker.

Most of the county can be considered a natural area as it consists largely of uninhabited mountains. The valleys only are populated. A 40,000 acre unspoiled wilderness area exists in the National Forest in the northwest part of the country.

The soils are not for the most part a limiting factor as they are porous and stable.

The water areas consist of many streams, mountain lakes, a main river, and three impoundments covering about 14,000 acres. Very little of the shoreline of these impoundments has been developed.

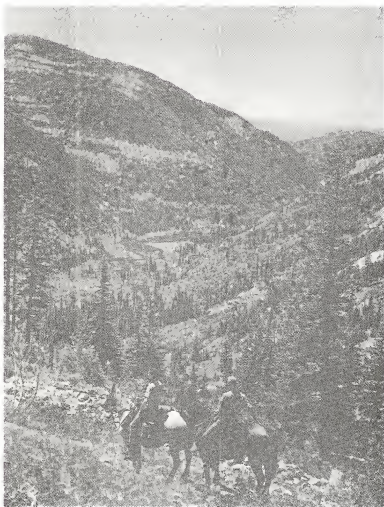
The three major water impoundments on the Clark Fork river are new and practically undeveloped for camping. These have a good potential.

A tourist route, Highway 10 A traverses the main Clark Fork valley from east to west. Other trunk roads lead from this to camping areas in tributaries to the main valley.



An unusual experience - Mountain Sheep are frequently seen by tourists traveling along Highway 10 A. K. A. Eggensperger Photo.

The potential for pack trips to camping areas is high. The mountainous areas for the most part are quite heavily developed with logging roads but certain high-zone areas and the wilderness area have restrictions as to road construction. The Cabinet Wilderness area is partially developed with trails, with more being needed to make the most rugged parts accessible to the adventurous camper.



Visiting Rock Creek
Meadows on horseback.

One of many exciting
trips.

K. A. Eggensperger Photo

III PICNIC AND FIELD SPORTS AREAS

Basically, these are areas developed for concentrated play activities other than golf, water sports and winter sports. Areas providing ball diamonds, tennis courts, tracks and facilities for other competitive games are types of developments in this category. Others would include picnicing, bicycling and sports shooting areas.

This enterprise was rated low in Sanders county because of the lack of concentrated populations needed to make this type of activity successful.

IV FISHING WATERS

Practically all waters in Sanders County provide an opportunity for catching fish. Most waters are in public ownership and thus any enterprise should be of the type needed to provide services.

The county is bisected by a major drainage flowing from east to the west, the Clark Fork river. Flowing into this drainage are over forty side drainages, the most important Bull River, Thompson River, Prospect Creek and Elk Creek.



The Clarks Fork River is just one of many waters available to the angler the year around. K. A. Eggensperger Photo.

Each of the numerous drainages have a multitude of smaller creeks flowing into them, some of which produce fishing possibilities.

The large impoundments formed by the three dams on the Clark Fork are not presently managed intensively, but some potential is there if the demand of population increases make it economically feasible for "put and take" fish management.

Warm water fishing is not an important source of recreation in this county and therefore, it is not rated. The few bass areas are found in shallow sloughs and backwaters along the main river.

There are numerous natural lakes in this county that produce fishing for the fisherman who likes to drive to his lake, walk to a lake or ride a horse to a high-country lake.

V GOLF COURSES

There are two golf courses located in Sanders County. Both are nine hole courses with sand greens. One is located west of Plains and the other west of Thompson Falls. Both courses are primarily used by the local people. The one at Plains is owned by the town of Plains, while the one near Thompson Falls is owned by the local golf club.

The potential for increasing golfing facilities is limited. The existing facilities will most likely be satisfactory to meet the golfing needs of the area for some time to come.



Plains golf course



VI HUNTING AREAS

Big game hunting is the foremost outdoor recreational activity in Sanders County. A majority of the land is within the National Forest boundaries and is therefore open to public hunting. Accompanying this asset is the fact that this county embraces some of the best big game habitat in western Montana.

Elk, deer (mule and white-tailed), bighorns, moose and black bear and rocky mountain goats are included in the bag limits of annual seasons regulated by the Montana Fish and Game Commission.



Bull Elk - This majestic animal attracts many enthusiastic hunters to the area.

C. J. Ekman Photo.

Waterfowl are also found in limited numbers in the northeastern portion of the county where some grain crops are raised and along the two main rivers (Flathead and Clark Fork) that bisect the county.

Other wildlife species hunted are snowshoe hare, bobcat, coyote, mountain lion and ground squirrel.

All species hunted receive relatively light hunting pressure.

Winter range is a major factor on most game species and it is the limiting factor in this county. In relation to other surrounding counties it has substantially more numbers of big game animals per unit area. However, the numbers of big game will be limited to the tolerance of ranchers living on the valley floor when winter and spring populations of deer and elk invade their hay and grain fields.

The success of the Forest Service efforts in providing winter range by clear cutting timber and controlled burning will also play a large role in the future big game numbers.

Climate, as it directly affects the hunter, is moderate enough to allow extensive use during most of the big game season and is not a restricting element.

Soils are a restrictive element in limiting small game and waterfowl hunting by limiting the food and cover produced. Small game hunting would improve if a change from livestock raising to grain crop production were realized.

Wildlife habitat controls the potential of any hunting area. A majority of the land area being forested mountains that rise from elevations in excess of 6,000 feet to less than 3,000 feet offer cover and food best adapted to big game and mountain grouse. Limited acreage of cleared river bottom lands being used for grazing and hay lands are not ideal small game habitat.

Wildlife populations are relatively high for big game and native grouse, but low for other forms of small game.



Mountain Goat - a treasured trophy for the fortunate.

K. A. Eggensperger Photo.

Size and distribution of the hunter population is not a limiting factor of big game hunting. Modern methods of transportation bring in people from great distances in proportional numbers to the success of other hunters. Local services now available cannot handle the numbers of non-local hunters this area will receive within the next several years. Local hunters (county residents) alone cannot properly harvest available big game species.

The income level of county residents has little bearing on the amount of hunting done. A majority of the male residents do buy a hunting license of some kind. The income level of the community would be raised if more guide and outfitter services were available to non-residents and if the outfitters sought clientele in the proper places.

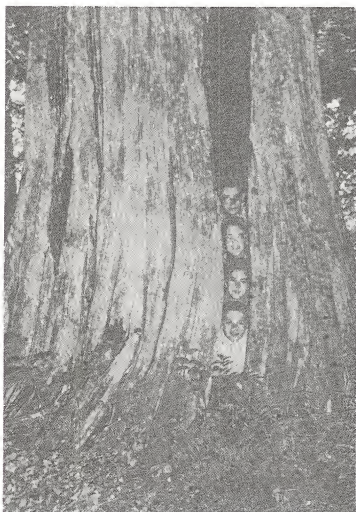
Proximity of cities is not recognized as an important factor. Spokane, Washington and Coeur d'Alene, Idaho are close, but non-resident license fees along with adequate opportunities in their own state tend to reduce their visits to Sanders County. Limited numbers of people come from various parts of Montana; the increase of hunters at Libby working on dam construction is expected to increase the hunting population of this area.

Rural land ownership pattern is mostly on the river bottoms and extending a short distance up each side drainage. During winters of deep snow game wintering on privately owned lands increases and is thus a limiting factor of big game numbers.

VII NATURAL AND SCENIC AND HISTORIC AREAS

The cabinet Primitive Area in the northwest part of the County is a natural area of great beauty. Use at present is limited by lack of trails.

The scenery in the entire County is outstanding. Numerous roads give access to the valleys and back country for scenic viewers.



Ross Creek Cedars -

A visit here is family
fun in a primeval setting.

K. A. Eggensperger Photo.

VIII RIDING STABLES

Though there are no riding stables located within Sanders County at the present time and possibilities for the immediate future are limited; the long range picture could be different.

When the scenic beauty and back country of western Sanders County draws more total summer vacationists, the opportunity for riding facilities to the public may also come. With the large amount of public forest land, trails for riding would be unlimited.

IX SHOOTING PRESERVES

The abundance of opportunities to hunt game species satisfies the needs of the local population and the distance from high population centers are limiting factors for this enterprise in Sanders County.

The group therefore, felt that the potential for this kind of enterprise was low.

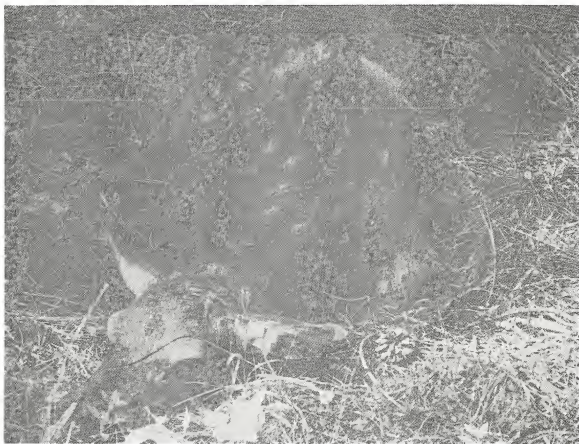
X VACATION FARMS AND RANCHES

A vacation farm or ranch may offer home-cooked meals and country living or light housekeeping facilities, rented on a weekly basis, for urban people. A vacation farm is heavily resource-oriented and often places emphasis on a variety of farming activities. It is strictly rural in its "atmosphere." Other recreation activities may be offered such as fishing, horseback riding, wrangling and games.

The potential for vacation farm enterprises in Sanders County is high.

Climate during the summer vacation period in Sanders County is very attractive. It is a favorable change from that in the urban areas where the potential clientele come from. Cool nights and warm days are dependable for vacation farm enterprises. Rating for this element is high.

Scenery is important in evaluating potentials for this enterprise. Very attractive surroundings are beneficial. However, as with climate, this is a relative matter. The scenery needs to be very attractive in relation to that where the clientele come from--the city-suburb areas. Scenery was evaluated in comparison with that in the urban centers and in competing vacation areas, and rated high.



Calf Elk - One of the many subjects for the camera of the amateur or professional on vacation. K. A. Eggensperger Photo.

Natural areas are an important element in the evaluation of vacation farms. They do not necessarily have to be on the property that may be in this business, but must be nearby. They are a part of the drawing power of an area for the kinds of vacations sought on farms. The inventory of natural areas for the county indicated their significance in encouraging and supporting this kind of enterprise. This element was rated high.

Soils have significance for vacation ranches as an appraisal element. Sanders County soils are generally suited to this type of enterprise. However, some soils may be restricting from the standpoint of being excessively gummy when wet.

Existing water areas enhance the possibilities for developing adjacent farm lands for vacation purposes. The primary water areas in the county, along with many other smaller streams and ponds on farms, are significant for this kind of enterprise. This element is rated high.

Water impoundment sites can be as important as existing waters in developing this potential. In addition, to those inventoried, most farms have sites to build small ponds.

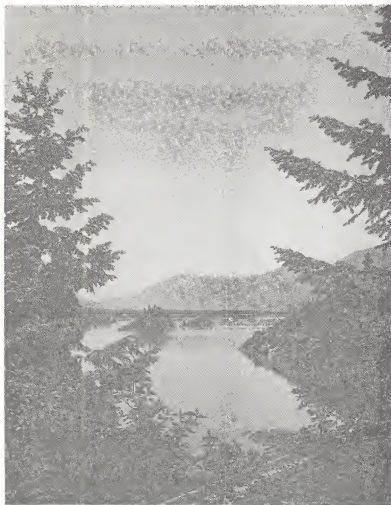
Proximity to cities of vacation farm areas is significant in the same way it was for vacation cabins, cottages, and homesites. All distant urban centers were included in the criterion, but main emphasis was given to those within 300 miles.

Rural ownership and land use patterns have a strong influence on the potential for vacation farms. A favorable pattern for potential vacation farms is a long-stabilized ownership of family-type farms of 160 acres and above with general farming, livestock or dairy enterprise. These often have large and quite old farm homes. There are also ranches of 1000 acres and over which have the true "western" type of operation which is so attractive to the city dweller. This element is rated high.

XI WATER SPORTS AREAS

There are a number of areas devoted primarily to swimming, sun bathing, boating and water skiing. These being the primary water sports of the area.

The projected demand for such facilities will steadily increase during the years to come. Many people now spend weekends on the water shores, thus combining camping and water sports.



Noxon Reservoir - one of three large reservoirs in the area offering various types of water sports activities.

Washington
Water Power Photo

Cabins for weekends are also becoming very popular in the county in connection with water sports, some people spending a vacation or sometimes an entire summer here on the water.

The summers during the vacation period are usually very pleasant, this area enjoying a warmer climate than most of the adjoining area.

Sanders County rates relatively high in potential as a water sports area due to water and shore area. There are three impoundments with approximately one hundred and ten miles of shoreline, many bays and natural boat shelters. There are also several islands. The long distance to cities with large populations does limit the potential.

XII WINTER SPORTS AREAS

The climate is not conducive to a high potential for skiing. The winters are relatively mild with frequent rain storms, even in January and February. Sub-zero weather, except at high elevations, is usually of short duration. Snowfall is abundant in the high mountains, but there are few large basin-type areas suitable for development. Sanders County has at times the driest spot in the state, at



Corona Ski Area - family fun in the wintertime. K. A. Eggensperger Photo.

Lonepine, with a total annual precipitation of just under ten inches, and the wettest, at Heron, with thirty-two inches of precipitation. The mean annual temperature at Thompson Falls is the highest in the state.

The population of the county is about 7,000. The closest city is Missoula, with a population of about 30,000.

Snow mobiling has a good potential as there are many roads into the mountains over which such vehicles can travel.

For Further Information

On General Recreational Development in Sanders County

Contact the Following:

Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce
Hot Springs, Montana 59845

Plains-Paradise Chamber of Commerce
Plains, Montana 59859

Thompson Falls-Noxon Chamber of Commerce
Thompson Falls, Montana 59873

For Hunting and Fishing Information Contact:

A. H. Cheney, Game Warden
Montana Fish and Game
Thompson Falls, Montana 59873

For Information on Camping, Packing and Recreation Contact:

United States Forest Service at one of the following
Addresses:

Plains Ranger Station, Plains, Montana 59859
Thompson Falls Ranger Station, Thompson Falls, Montana 59873
Trout Creek Ranger Station, Trout Creek, Montana 59874
Noxon Ranger Station, Noxon, Montana 59853

For Technical and Financial Assistance Available for
Recreational Development Contact:

Soil Conservation Service, Plains, Montana 59859
County Extension Service, Thompson Falls, Montana 59873
Farmers Home Administration, Missoula, Montana 59801
State Service Forester, Plains, Montana 59859
Sanders County ASCS Office, Plains, Montana 59859

For Information on Minerals for Hobbyists Contact:

Montana College of Mineral Science and Technology
Butte, Montana 59701

